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## Extended essay cover

Candidates must complete this page and then give this cover and their final version of the extended essay to their supervisor.

Candidate session number

Candidate name

School name

Examination session (May or November)

May

2015

Diploma Programme subject in which this extended essay is registered: VISUAL ARTS

(For an extended essay in the area of languages, state the language and whether it is group 1 or group 2.)

Title of the extended essay: To what extent was postmodern architect Michael Graves, successful in the design of the St. Coletta School?

### Candidate's declaration

*This declaration must be signed by the candidate; otherwise a mark of zero will be issued.*

The extended essay I am submitting is my own work (apart from guidance allowed by the International Baccalaureate).

I have acknowledged each use of the words, graphics or ideas of another person, whether written, oral or visual.

I am aware that the word limit for all extended essays is 4000 words and that examiners are not required to read beyond this limit.

This is the final version of my extended essay.

Candidate's signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: 12/01/15

## Supervisor's report and declaration

The supervisor must complete this report, sign the declaration and then give the final version of the extended essay, with this cover attached, to the Diploma Programme coordinator.

Name of supervisor (CAPITAL letters) \_\_\_\_\_

Please comment, as appropriate, on the candidate's performance, the context in which the candidate undertook the research for the extended essay, any difficulties encountered and how these were overcome (see page 13 of the extended essay guide). The concluding interview (viva voce) may provide useful information. These comments can help the examiner award a level for criterion K (holistic judgment). Do not comment on any adverse personal circumstances that may have affected the candidate. If the amount of time spent with the candidate was zero, you must explain this, in particular how it was then possible to authenticate the essay as the candidate's own work. You may attach an additional sheet if there is insufficient space here.

's Extended Essay offers a thorough analysis of the architectural work of She provides a good discussion of the theme of post modernism in architecture and how this approach was most suitable for the needs of the individuals attending the School, designed by Michael Graves. 's essay demonstrates the ability to express her ideas clearly with appropriate references to support her ideas. Although I suggested it would have been helpful to have spoken to somebody who works in the building or attends the school in order to get firsthand, primary information, had difficulty contacting staff.

When she began the essay, it was evident that her writing and sentence structure was influenced by her native language, Spanish, and also her French education. Therefore, and I worked together at improving sentence structure and ensuring that the most relevant information was included in the essay in order to answer her research question.

's strength in her essay was her ability to begin the process early. She knew early on that she wanted to study either Engineering or Architecture, therefore she chose a topic that she had not heard of specifically, Post Modernist Architecture, in order to improve her knowledge base.

Another of 's strengths in the essay is in her thorough analysis of every aspect of the building and how it related to the success of the School. She did not lose sight of the importance of answering her essay question.

is also a Higher Art student and she finds that writing this essay has contributed to a deeper understanding of structure in her work. At first, she focused on portraiture but her work slowly evolved into an appreciation of the framework or architecture of objects.

This declaration must be signed by the supervisor; otherwise a mark of zero will be issued.

I have read the final version of the extended essay that will be submitted to the examiner.

To the best of my knowledge, the extended essay is the authentic work of the candidate.

As per the section entitled "Responsibilities of the Supervisor" in the EE guide, the recommended number of hours spent with candidates is between 3 and 5 hours. Schools will be contacted when the number of hours is left blank, or where 0 hours are stated and there lacks an explanation. Schools will also be contacted in the event that number of hours spent is significantly excessive compared to the recommendation.

I spent 3.5 hours with the candidate discussing the progress of the extended essay.

Supervisor's signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: 9/2/15



## Assessment form (for examiner use only)

Candidate session number		
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Criteria	Achievement level				
	Examiner 1	maximum	Examiner 2	maximum	Examiner 3
A research question	2		2	2	
B introduction	2		1	2	
C investigation	4		2	4	
D knowledge and understanding	4		2	4	
E reasoned argument	4		2	4	
F analysis and evaluation	4		2	4	
G use of subject language	4		2	4	
H conclusion	2		1	2	
I formal presentation	4		2	4	
J abstract	2		1	2	
K holistic judgment	4		1	4	

Total out of 36




Name of examiner 1: \_\_\_\_\_ Examiner number: \_\_\_\_\_  
(CAPITAL letters)

Name of examiner 2: \_\_\_\_\_ Examiner number: \_\_\_\_\_  
(CAPITAL letters)

Name of examiner 3: \_\_\_\_\_ Examiner number: \_\_\_\_\_  
(CAPITAL letters)

IB Assessment Centre use only: B: \_\_\_\_\_

IB Assessment Centre use only: A: \_\_\_\_\_

# **IB Diploma**

## **Extended Essay**

*“To what extent was postmodern architect, Michael Graves, successful in  
the design of the School?”*

**Subject:** . VISUAL ARTS

**Session:** May 2015

**Word count:** 3,952

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## Abstract

This essay will argue whether Michael Graves was successful in designing the St. School, a school for children and adults with disabilities, using a postmodern architecture style. It begins by explaining what categorizes architecture as postmodern and states the basic requirements for a building to be accessible by handicapped users. The introduction also includes a brief biography of Michael Graves and a history of postmodern architecture. The essay presents three photos of the school that are analyzed in depth followed by explanations about why each element is effective and how the inhabitants of the school benefit from it. The photos portray two facades and the main hallway. It becomes clear that the majority of the crucial elements to the school would not be acceptable in other architectural styles. Examples of this are the building block shaped houses on the facade and the variety of colors since they present inconveniences and unnecessary costs. Unlike modernism, that disregards everything but functionality, postmodernism has ornament, which allowed for these key aspects of the school's architecture. The conclusion reached is that the school would not be able to reach its full potential having not been built in the postmodern architectural style and that Michael Graves made it not only accessible for the students but also engaging. To close, the essay ends with another example of Michael Graves successfully using postmodern architecture in a similar situation. This shows how flexible postmodernism can be since it has so few limits and guidelines.

How?

2

more info needed on  
how the research was  
undertaken.

## **Postmodernism**

Postmodernism is a movement that began in America between 1960 and 1970 (Boundless). It was an attempt to extend modernism. Modernism was based on functionality and economy and, consequentially, is unornamented and bland. Some architects, for example Robert Venturi, thought it had too many limitations and did not allow expression (WTTW). It was seen as plain and unpleasant. The style was functional but did not meet a desire for beauty. Architects reintroduced color into their buildings and decoration. Postmodernists wanted their buildings to have meaning by making them communicative and contextual. Taking this into account, postmodernists were considerate of the context when choosing materials and forms for their buildings. The architects using this style rarely collaborated and the lack of limitations caused each architect to interpret the style differently. This resulted in a vast amount of completely unique buildings. Another characteristic is that it uses aspects from past architectural styles, often many at once. Postmodern architects referred to the past and merged several different aspects of previous styles and created a completely new one. It incorporates classical Greek and Roman architecture but adapts them, not recreates them.

## **Michael Graves**

An important influence during this movement was Michael Graves. Michael Graves is an American architect who has studied at the University of Cincinnati, Harvard and Rome. He began working as a private house creator in the style of orthodox modernism under the influence of Le Corbusier. Graves began to see his style as plain and began rejecting it. On that account, he started interpreting previous architecture techniques in a cubist approach and soon became a principal figure in the postmodernist

movement (Britannica, "Michael Graves"). Michael Graves is well known for his liberal use of cubism, color and texture. One of his notable works is the Portland Public Services Building in Portland, Oregon (Britannica, "Western Architecture"). This is the first major postmodern building built between 1979 and 1982. The building resembles children's building blocks stacked on top of each other. Nonetheless, it has several classical features for example brackets and pilasters. There are also ornamental decoration like the swags and garlands. These aspects aren't just taken from previous styles but are altered by enlarging and abstracting them to fit context. The building consists of blocks of various shapes stacked upon one another and is painted in pastel tones. Although all postmodernist buildings vary vastly from one another, Michael Grave's other works all share some similar aspects. These include geometric shapes, exaggerated features and unconventional colors.

## **St. School**

The project that stands out most to me is the St. School. This school serves children and adults with intellectual or physical disabilities, autism, or a mix (St. of Greater Washington).

**I will be discussing to what extent Michael Graves was successful in designing the St. Coletta School using post-modern architecture.**

The school was founded in 1959 by a couple that could not find an educational system for their child with Down's syndrome. At first it was located in a basement then moved from location to location until a permanent facility was purchased in 1996. The new abundance of space allowed the school to accommodate adults as well. In September 2006 the school moved to its <sup>?</sup>correct location in Washington. The designing and building process began in 2001 and it cost 32 million dollars to build the school of 30,000 square meters.



It contains art, music and physical therapy studios, a sensory room, and a hydrotherapy pool. In addition, a gymnasium, a basketball court, a playground, an amphitheater, a garden and kitchens (St. Coletta of Greater Washington). Among the architectural features are a multitude of windows and skylights that brighten and enhance the colors inside, a geometric pavilion covered in glazed tiles and arched ceiling hallways. Each schoolhouse is painted a different color to help them identify different rooms. Graves addressed functional, social and ecological concerns in the designing of the school. He had to be sure that the school fit the needs required and was easily accessible to its students. Furthermore, the design could not be too outrageous so that it did not offend the varied aesthetic preferences within the community. The school is also covered in grass patches and trees to provide a natural, green element. While planning the project Graves became paralyzed, due to an infection, and was confined to a wheelchair which caused him to obtain a much more personal perspective while designing the school (Sveiven, Arch Daily).

Geometric shapes, structural forms and high ceiling are very characteristic of postmodernism. It often appears to be in excess and has several aspects derived from previous architecture styles. The high ceiling, exaggerated sizes and arches come from the influence of classical roman architecture (Britannica).

Postmodernism appears to be the ideal style for the St. School because it is contextual. It is contextual in that Graves made it accessible to all children, keeping the circumstances in mind. Postmodernism also uses the idea of excess so windows and doorways are enlarged which is beneficial to the students because everything is discernible this way. The structural forms and geometric shapes are simple and

recognizable. Instead of following a conventional color scheme, Michael Graves used a variety of colors that all differed from each other in order to enhance the simplistic design. Although the community was initially stunned by the upscale design, this design does prove to be effective for the purpose of this school (Sveiven, Arch Daily).

Moreover, all these extravagant designs came with their costs. With this in mind, I will be discussing to what extent was postmodernism an effective style for the design of the St.

School.

People with disabilities need to be able to orient themselves easily in a big facility like a school. Michael Graves had this in mind while creating the school. These also differentiate the building from other schools. The hallways and doorways are large so their width is big enough to accommodate wheelchairs. The majority of the building is based at ground level, which aids wheelchair users or people with physical disabilities. There are handrails on the staircases. All entrances are distinct and easily accessible. All hallways and doorways are open and not blocked by any obstructions. Contrasting colors makes signs more clear which helps with orientation. Important places like classrooms and doorways contrast with surroundings so they are distinguishable. Students can remember their classes by the color of the room or building.

By analyzing the three following photos of the St. School, I will explain the contribution of the architectural elements and design to education and particularly how they help the disabled users of the school.

It is unclear in the introduction why this particular building was chosen by the candidate.

## Analysis of St. School



Graves, "St. School west facade"

The first picture depicts five houses in a row. The geometrically shaped houses are all attached and together make up the façade, which is covered in glossy tiles. These houses are also represented in the school's logo, which demonstrates the building blocks for life that the school provides to the students. The geometric and symmetrical shapes are very simple making each building easily distinguishable and describable. This way, students can make their way around the school on their own because they can recognize these shapes and remember them more easily. In addition, they can associate their class to the shape or color of the house it is in. because of their innocent appearance, the houses contribute to a playful and welcoming atmosphere. Since each shape is unique, each building has equal attention and can easily be seen or spotted out from the others. Although they are all different, each building shares a symmetrical element providing harmony and balance to the whole structure. Furthermore, the variety of shapes and colors is visually stimulating and the simple shapes are engaging to the students. The soft pastel colors of these houses contrast the bold elements in the design. Nevertheless, they

How do  
you  
know?

hold to the simplistic features because they are primary and secondary colors. These colors portray purity or youth and innocence, which makes the building appear safe and welcoming. The newsletter, ArchDaily, wrote in an article:

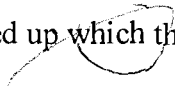
*“The bright colors and simple forms make it very fitting for the people that the building serves, as it is fun, playful and inviting.”*

*(Sveiven)*

Glass tiles are an effective material to incorporate because of their glossy and reflective properties. They provide an intricate pattern to the façade and add detail. Moreover, since the façade is large with abundant empty and unused space, the tiles make it more ornate and elaborate instead of leaving it plain.

All the buildings are attached but it is unclear because their connections are tiled in a darker color that disappears behind the delightful color of the houses. This provides more emphasis and thus more importance to the houses. The separate shapes have to be the dominant features for students to locate them. Additionally, the dark blue strip at the bottom of the building also unifies the buildings and creates movement along them. It is the only element that is continuous throughout the buildings. It is a uniform rectangle which makes the shapes appear organized and neatly lined up creating order. The bold windows are striking elements of this façade. It can be noted that each building has a small window above a large square one. The large windows permit a clear view of the inside of the building, which can make identifying a house easier since each interior is painted in a different color. This way students can identify which building their classroom is in from outside. The windows have a simple grid on them, which is a caricature like element. It gives the impression of a child's drawing of a window allowing

students to recognize them more easily. All windows are outlined with a white and thick frame. The frame is similar to that of a painting. It borders the window and directs attention to what it contains. In this case the frame contains interior so they attract attention the room inside each building. Moreover, it makes them more obvious and easier to distinguish.

The house on the right is an entrance and can be discerned by the doors. The doors have a similar style to the windows but since they are bigger and the grid is thicker it stands out. It is differentiated from the other houses because of its greater height and by the white over hang that is supported by a cylindrical column. It is lined up  which the path beneath it, which creates a feeling a feeling of shelter and protection thereby creating a welcoming atmosphere. The cylindrical shape of the column mimics the shape of the house behind it providing a harmonious effect. The over hang is perfectly centered and symmetrical like the rest of the houses and symmetrically shows congruity in the whole structure. Even so, it still contrasts with the rest, which makes it distinguishable and its purpose as an entrance is clear to users of the school. All the aspects of this architecture are exaggerated. Finally, The windows are oversized, their frames are thick, and the shapes of the houses are bold. These exaggerations make the school seem like a child's drawing. Creating everything larger provides clarity and makes all the elements discernible. This façade is very striking due to its originality but Graves made sure that it still fit in with the neighborhood. Bob Miller, an associate of Graves, mentioned in an interview:



*“The east façade of school—which contains three of the five “houses”—was designed in both scale and form to relate to the residential neighborhood it borders.”*

*(Van Mourik)*



Fig 2

Graves, “St.

School main hallways”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Since all the photographs did not have any names formally given to them, I located them in a floor plan of the school and from there determined each one’s appropriate name.

This is a picture of the hallway that runs completely along the school. Just as the façade previously shown, it appears surreal. Elements are exaggerated and certain features are dominant. Firstly, the color blue is used throughout this hallway. It is a very serene and calming color. Having both the ceiling and walls of this color enhance this effect because users are completely surrounded in this atmosphere. Blue also helps to open up the hallways and make it appear larger because it resembles the sky or an ocean. Having the whole hallway in one simple color is playful and friendly because there are not any overwhelming or strong colors causing chaos and stress. Secondly, The ceiling is curved and in the shape of an arch. The lack of sharp edges is much softer and gentle, creating a welcoming atmosphere. There is no division between wall and ceiling creating a dome overhead, which is considerably more majestic than a typical flat ceiling. These playful and captivating aspects give a more exciting ambiance to the school. Additionally, The hallway itself is exceedingly wide and long making the area spacious and thus preventing any clutter or traffic. This is important because wheelchairs pass through in great numbers. It creates an air of freedom and liberation as a result of the open space. Furthermore, the great length of the hallway has the effect of creating a thrilling and dramatic atmosphere.

There is a variation of hanging lights and skylights along the ceiling. They are all lined up and alternate between each other. This creates a pattern along the hallways, which is coherent and organized. These are also elegant and decorate the space while the skylights allow for natural light. At the end of the hallway, a square window is visible. Instead of the hallway ending abruptly with a wall, this large window creates flow and continuity to the outdoors. This also allows light to enter. Arch Daily wrote:

*“Arched ceilings and multiple skylights add to the experience, as rooms are brightened and colors are enhanced by the flow of natural light.”*

*(Sveiven)*

The doors along the sides of the hallway are glass and gridded. As a result, the hallway seems less confined because it is possible to see into other rooms. This also allows students to see the interior of a room so they know they are in the right place. In addition, the rooms appear less intimidating due to the open and identifiable space. Light from the room also spills into the hallways illuminating the entrance.

The door is of similar design to the entrance on the façade in picture.1. The entrance to the room is clearly emphasized because it protrudes out of the wall. Varying the depth places emphasis on this spot in particular, marking its importance by making it more visible. Since this also acts like a frame to the door, it directs attention towards it. The hallway is more fascinating as a result of the varying depth along the walls. It also can create the illusion of an oversized doorway, which adds to the surrealism of the school. Likewise, the ceiling also has protruding elements; there are arches that come down from the ceiling. They are placed in-between the hanging lights and skylights, dividing them. These are repeated orderly, which creates harmony.



Fig. 1 Graves, "St. School north facade"

This picture shows another entrance to the school, which is perpendicular to the hallway. Many features are repeated throughout all three pictures, for example magnification and simplicity. The large bricks look roughly like building blocks stacked up together. It is a very simple design because of the organized repetition. The bricks are not real but painted making it resemble a drawing by a child. The size of the bricks is exaggerated. As opposed to having many small bricks, the large bricks minimize visual texture. The shapes are also clearer this way and add to the general simplicity of the school. Three colors can be seen on this façade. These are red blue and yellow; the primary colors. These colors are well known and discernable but they also create many pleasant atmospheres. Red provokes thrill and enthusiasm, yellow provokes happiness and tranquility and blue is serene. All these colors combined create a childish and friendly atmosphere.

There is a glass semi-circle entrance, which contrasts the rest of the façade because it is curved unlike the rectangle pattern of bricks. This feature makes the

entrance distinguishable from the rest of this part of the building. It is also outlined in white separating it from the rest of the wall. The lack of harsh edges makes it less intimidating and more welcoming. The glass allows natural light to enter inside and makes the interior visible from outside contributing to a friendlier, open environment. Seeing inside also creates depth. There is a double door in the middle of the glass wide enough to allow wheel chairs to easily pass through. The glass doors are elegant and decorative. The transparent door creates a welcoming feeling, so there is no mystery while entering the school.

A comical feature is the skylight placed right on top of the structure. It appears to be a window simply balancing on the roof from the angle of the picture. This attracts unnecessary attention to the skylight in which the purpose is to let in natural light. Making this stand out has only an ornamental purpose, which is a characteristic of post-modernism. The placement of the skylight also makes it resemble another building block that is placed above to top of the building. The windows near the bottom are rectangular but in the opposite direction of the brick pattern generating they are in conflict. This does, however, add variety to the plain pattern along the entire façade. It makes it dynamic and stimulating. They also create movement from the bottom to the top of the façade. Above of these there are square windows. These windows are very simple and organic. They balance out the empty space created by the gabled roof. They are caricature like and exaggerated giving a fun and playful atmosphere. Having them perfectly aligned with the window below them simplifies the design. These windows are also outlined in white directing attention towards them. The shapes are simple like the semi circle entrance and square and rectangular windows. The whole façade is also symmetrical through the



middle attracting attention to the middle where the entrance is located. The roof is gabled so it is in the shape of a triangle. This is one-dimensional so it flattens the façade making it simpler. By simply looking at the outline, this façade resembles a child drawing of a house. Students will find this image familiar and as a result will be eager to enter the building. The straight path leads directly to the entrance. The pathway is very wide allowing many people to pass through at once which is helpful when school begins in the morning and it can be crowded.

It is clear from this analysis that Graves kept in mind the particular needs of the students while designing the school. The design is engaging and interactive while remaining simple as to not overwhelm them. The simplicity is key because it makes it easy to memorize and recognize aspects of the school allowing students to locate rooms and make their way around independently. This relates to the contextual quality of postmodern architecture. Having not taken to account to mental and physical concerns of the students this school would be completely different. Graves did not only design for this but also managed to keep the structure aesthetically pleasing in the process.

After extensively analyzing the postmodern elements in the school's architecture it can be concluded that Michael Graves was successful in designing the St. School using a post-modern architecture style. This style allowed there to be a variety of colors and ornamental features that make the school so unique. A modernist architecture style would not have decorative elements. All rooms would be similar and, as a result, the students would not be able to differentiate them. Many of the features that make the school so effective would not be used in modernist building since they would not be deemed as functional. An example of this is the inverted triangle roof from picture.1.

This shape is very inconvenient and presents several problems. Waste, rain and snow can accumulate in the valley. This means there must be a draining systems and constant cleaning of the area, all of which includes a cost. A modernist architect would think this poses too much of a problem and does not serve any clear purpose so they would exclude this from their design. Graves must have thought this shape was unique and that its form is not only helpful to the students but also aesthetically appropriate. The same would apply to how each schoolhouse is different color. This and many other examples show how postmodernism aids the students to learn independence since they are able to orient themselves with ease.

### **Wounded Warrior Project**



Graves, "Wounded Warrior Home entrance"

Since postmodernism is such a flexible architecture style, building can be quite different even if built by the same architect. An example in this case would be Grave's Wounded Warrior Home Project, which serves a similar purpose as the St. School. The photo above is the entrance to one of the prototypes designed by Graves. These houses are for soldiers who were injured physically or mentally during their service (Michael Graves & Associates). The soldiers suffer from multiple injuries and conditions including paralysis, blindness, loss of limbs and post-traumatic stress disorder (Wounded Warrior Home Project).

The home is a single story building that has an open floor plan, low windows, door sensors, and several other features that will assist the residents. When a soldier returns injured from war, there is often a long and difficult rehabilitation process. They learn to adjust to their new lifestyle. These houses are designed to help the veterans and their families cope with the new physical and mental disabilities. Clark Realty Capital and the U.S. army brought this project to reality. They recruited scientists, psychologists, consultants, builders, engineers and architects (Wounded Warrior Home Project). Michael Graves had already been confined to a wheelchair due to an infection at this point. Upon being contacted about this project he immediately wanted to be a part of the team. Although Graves is a world famous architect and this project only involved designing two prototypes, he felt compelled to help since he was able to relate to their disabilities (Montagne, NPR).

## **Conclusion**

The Wounded Warrior Project Houses share some resemblance with the St.

School. This is probably because the students and the war veterans share some

common needs. A good architect can design a building to serve any purpose and benefit its users. But having some a personal connection with the people for whom the building will be serving will take the architecture to the next level. Michael Graves was able to somewhat relate to the students that would use his school and to the war veterans that could live in the house. I think that the fact that he has a physical disability helped to make these projects personal to him and contributed to the success of their designs.

The main factor, however, in the success of St. School, is no doubt the use of postmodernism. In my analysis of St. School, one can clearly understand how postmodernism is the ideal style for this school and Graves was successful in designing it. It allows the students to inhabit the space and remember it more easily so they can orient themselves in order to be more independent.

architectural analysis based on  
3 photographs! why not choose  
a postmodern building in  
Toronto, e.g. AGO. that candidate  
can visit & meet those who  
occupy, work, & visit the space  
as well as those who pass by

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